UNITED
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General Assembly

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A/AC.154/296
1 October 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH
THE HOST COUNTRY

LETTER DATED 27 SEPTEMBER 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH THE HOST COUNTRY

I have the honour to forward to you copy of a protest note verbale dated 26 September 1996 sent by the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the United Nations to the United States Mission to the United Nations concerning an incident involving the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H.E. Chief Tom Ikimi, which occurred on Thursday, 26 September 1996, at John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York, and to request that the text of the note verbale (see annex) be circulated as an official document of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country.

(Signed) Ibrahim A. GAMBARI

96-25876 (E) 031096 051096

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ANNEX

Note verbale dated 26 September 1996 from the Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations addressed to the United States Mission to the United Nations

The Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the United Nations presents its compliments to the United States Mission to the United Nations and wishes to protest to the latter against an incident involving the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H.E. Chief Tom Ikimi, which occurred today, 26 September 1996, at John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York.

The Minister arrived at New York by Swissair flight SR 110 to attend the session of the United Nations General Assembly currently being held in New York. He was escorted from the aircraft by a member of the staff of Swissair, Ms. Christina Aki, who took him and members of his entourage to the VIP immigration counter. The Minister's diplomatic passport and those of the members of his entourage were given to an immigration inspector, one Mr. R. Charles, who after checking the passports held them for some time without any explanation. After a long, unexplained delay, Mr. Charles disappeared with the passports for what turned out to be a consultation with the supervising immigration inspector, Ms. K. Celentano. Following repeated inquiries by officers from the Mission, who were at the airport to receive the Minister, Chief Ikimi was told that the Immigration authorities were trying to contact the State Department in Washington for the purpose of obtaining clearance, following their observation that the visa issued to the Minister and his entourage had restrictions on their movements while in the United States.

The Mission wishes to state that the excuse given by the supervising immigration inspector was unacceptable, for the State Department must have been aware of the Minister's journey, since it was the United States Embassy in Nigeria, an arm of the State Department, that had issued the entry visas. Also, the Minister was fully aware of the restrictions before embarking on the journey. And finally, the Minister had been to the United States several times with the same restrictions on his visa but had never experienced any problem at the airport of entry. The Mission has therefore concluded that what happened at the airport today was a deliberate attempt to embarrass and humiliate the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Although after an hour of unnecessary and embarrassing delay the Minister and his entourage were allowed into the United States, the Permanent Mission strongly objects to this incident, which constituted a serious embarrassment to the person of the Minister and to the dignity of Nigeria and was in total disregard of the fact that H.E. Chief Tom Ikimi and his entourage possessed the necessary entry visas into the United States. The incident forced him to miss an important scheduled engagement at the United Nations. It is also necessary to emphasize the fact that the only reason for the Minister's visit was to attend the session of the United Nations General Assembly. The Mission protests in strong terms against this unwarranted incident and requests that it be promptly clarified so as to avoid any repetition of same in the future.

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10 October 1996

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COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH THE
HOST COUNTRY

LETTER DATED 8 OCTOBER 1996 FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ON THE COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH THE HOST COUNTRY ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE

Enclosed please find the text of a note verbale dated 4 September 1996 from the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations, responding to the latter's note verbale dated 26 August 1996 (A/AC.154/292, annex) regarding the event of 17 August 1996 at the Northwest Airlines terminal at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

I kindly request that the text of the present letter and its annex be circulated as an official document of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country.

(Signed) Victor MARRERO

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ANNEX

Note verbale dated 4 September 1996 from the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations

The United States Mission to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations and refers to the latter's note verbale No. 661 of 26 August 1996 regarding the event of 17 August 1996 at the Northwest Airlines terminal at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

The United States Mission to the United Nations takes this opportunity to inform the Permanent Mission of Cuba that recent threats and actions by terrorist groups require heightened efforts by airline officials responsible for protecting the safety of air travellers. These procedures are designed to protect the security and safety of all persons who travel, including diplomats accredited to the United Nations in New York and their families.

The United States Mission to the United Nations regrets the inconvenience suffered by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on 17 August 1996 and has taken the necessary steps to avoid a repetition of the incident. Therefore, in the future, diplomats accredited to the United Nations and their family members who plan to travel from United States airports should carry their official United States Department of State identification cards with them for identification purposes at the airport.

In addition, the United States Mission to the United Nations wishes to inform the Permanent Mission of Cuba that diplomats and family members should expect that their luggage and their person will be subjected to normal security checks; for example, bags will be X-rayed and individuals will be expected to walk through the metal detectors. Moreover, an airline is within its right to decline to board a diplomat or family member who decline to voluntarily permit the search of their personal baggage or person.

The United States Mission to the United Nations again regrets that conditions are such that these procedures are necessary for the safety of air travellers and assumes that the Permanent Mission of Cuba understands that these measures are intended to ensure their safety as well as that of all other air travellers and will decide to cooperate with such operations in the future.

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LETTER DATED 8 OCTOBER 1996 FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ON THE COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH THE HOST COUNTRY ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE

Enclosed please find the text of a note verbale dated 4 October 1996 from the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to the Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations responding to the latter's note verbale dated 26 September 1996 (A/AC.154/296, annex) regarding the arrival in the United States on 26 September 1996 of the Honourable Foreign Minister, His Excellency Chief Tom Ikimi.

I kindly request that the text of the present letter and its annex be circulated as an official document of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country.

(Signed) Victor MARRERO

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Annex

Note verbale dated 4 October 1996 from the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to the Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations

The United States Mission to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the United Nations and, with reference to the latter's note verbale No. 139/96 dated 26 September 1996, wishes to assure the Permanent Mission that there was no intention by the United States to embarrass the Honourable Foreign Minister, His Excellency Chief Tom Ikimi, upon his arrival in the United States on 26 September 1996.

The United States takes its role as host country to the United Nations very seriously and endeavours to carry out that role in an exemplary fashion. On rare occasions, despite the best intentions of the host country, a mishap, such as the one described in the note, will occur. The United States Mission regrets any inconvenience to the arriving party.